

Air Force to Unveil Stealth Bomber

Service Discloses Previously Classified Details on Plane, Crew

By Molly Moore
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Air Force announced yesterday that its secret Stealth Advanced Technology Bomber will be unveiled to the public in November and revealed previously classified details about the aircraft and its crew.

Air Force officials said the futuristic B2 bomber has entered the final stage of its assembly process and will make its maiden flight in late fall.

It will be the first of 132 bombers scheduled for production.

The service disclosed that the sophisticated, highly automated bomber will be operated by a crew of only two, compared with the four-man crew of the B1 bomber. The V-shaped craft is 69 feet long with a wingspan of about 172 feet and is 17 feet high, the Air Force said in providing the first detailed description of the intercontinental bomber.

"The unique shape of the 'flying wing' design results in an aircraft that is only slightly longer than an

F15 fighter, yet has a wingspan almost as wide as a B52," the Air Force said in a statement.

The long-range bomber's special radar absorbent skin and curved shape are designed to enable the craft to penetrate deep into the Soviet Union and evade radars and air defenses longer than conventional aircraft.

The Air Force, however, still refused to disclose new cost estimates on the aircraft, one of its largest "black," or secret, programs. Although the service said it will not reveal the new figures until later this year, The Washington Post has previously reported that the cost of the bomber has climbed to an estimated \$450 million per plane, a 20 percent increase over past estimates.

The Air Force said yesterday that it has begun checking the first bomber's systems and instrumen-

tation, starting the "final phase in the assembly process leading to the first flight."

The contractor, Northrop Corp., "is currently well into the assembly phase of aircraft No. 2," the Air Force said.

The first six airplanes will be assigned to flight test duties, with five eventually joining the operational force.

The first plane will be "rolled out" for public viewing at Air Force Plant 42 in Palmdale, Calif., in mid-November, according to the Air Force. Officials said the plane will not make its first flight until later in the fall.

"Current plans call for the B2, which will have a capability to deliver both nuclear and conventional weapons against fixed and mobile targets, to achieve operational capability in the early 1990s," the statement said.

8709
Washington Post
5 Aug 88

CORRECTION

The Ritz Camera ad August 4, 1988, was incorrect. The price of one dollar for a Canon Sure Shot Supreme should have been published as \$179.95. The Wash-

TAX AUDIT???

Let us advise you and
or represent you